

# Objects in Focus

## Eliza Brightwen's Bible Album Whipple Museum of the History of Science



**Eliza Brightwen**  
(1830-1906)



**The Bible Album**

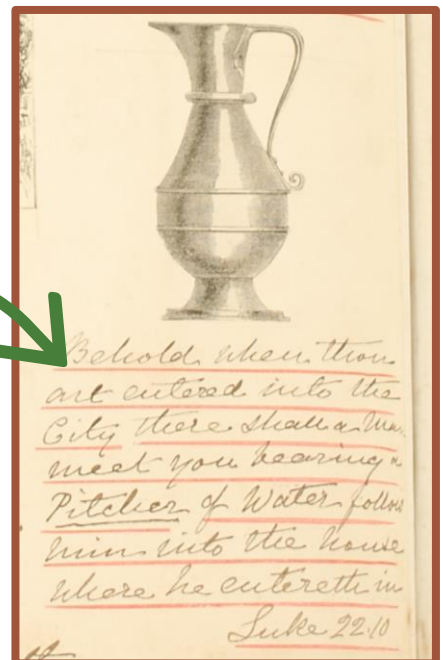
The Bible Album, **made by Eliza Brightwen throughout the 1870s**, is an excellent example of a personal Victorian scrapbook.

All 132 pages are **full with quotes from scripture, clippings, natural objects such as leaves and feathers, and drawings and paintings.**

**Eliza made the scrapbook during a time when she was very unwell** and often unable to leave her house. She had long held an interest in nature but received no formal education.

Following her husband's death in 1883, Eliza regained a sense of responsibility and independence and began to recover.

Eliza began writing about her encounters with nature from her 60's. She died at the age of 75 and **published 6 books about nature and became 'one of the most popular naturalists of her day'.**



## The album

Eliza was devoted to faith, nature, and her role in society as a woman. She expresses this throughout her scrapbook. **She searched carefully in her bible for verses that related to nature** or that were important to her and transcribed them, underlining parts. She **selected printed images, made drawings or paintings, or pasted in natural objects to illustrate the quotes.**



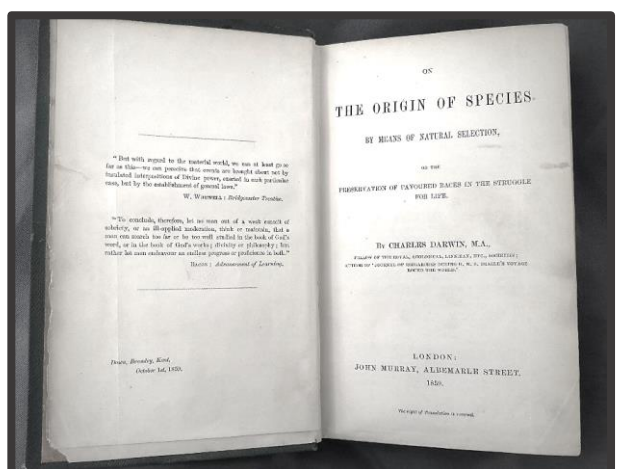
## A closer look

This page reflects **Eliza's incredible passion for birds** and the meticulous care with which she compiled each page. It shows **owls, an eagle, a cuckoo, a night hawk,** and the **raven**, as well as a **beetle**. It is accompanied by **two passages from the book of Deuteronomy**, which outline what animals and insects should not be eaten by people.



## Science in the 1800s

Eliza's scrapbooks and published works were written after the publications of Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* (1830) and Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859), which showed the world to be older than the book of Genesis suggested and gave evidence for natural selection and evolution. These works caused much debate in scientific circles.



## Eliza Brightwen and science

Eliza was not particularly influenced by contemporary debates. Whilst she associated with members of the scientific community including Philip Henry Gosse and George Henslow, and admired Darwin's work on orchids, her personal and published work incorporated a theology of nature. **She was not experimental, instead experiencing nature personally and with care and interest.**

## Eliza Brightwen's books

Her gentle, conversational works were still incredibly popular. The genuine care for the creatures she observed shone through.

**She kept many animals as pets and eventually converted her billiard room into a Home Museum, a new concept at the time.**

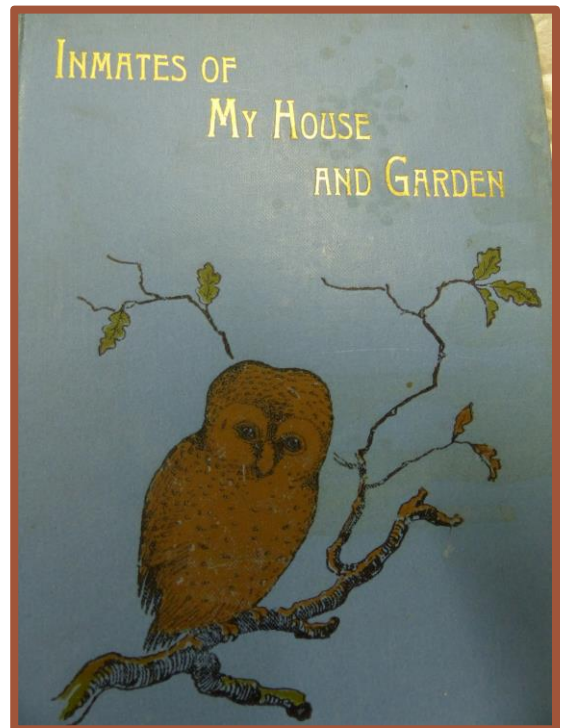
Many of her favourite creatures became familiar pets, including Richard the Second, a starling who could pronounce some words. Birdie, a Virginian nightingale, who constructed a nest for Eliza and tried to feed her flies.

Brightwen wrote about taming birds with **"good and kindness... till such a tie of love is found that they will come into our houses and give us their sweet company willingly"**.

## Observing nature

Eliza Brightwen's experiences and work is reminiscent of the joy and calm that we find in nature now, especially when we connect with it with kindness. Her pursuits brought peace and community to her, giving her respite from illness. Nature does not need to be extraordinary for us to find meaning within it.

**"Nature is an inexhaustible storehouse of wonders"  
Eliza Brightwen, *Glimpses into Plant Life*, 1897**



*The cover of Inmates of My House and Garden, Brightwen's second book*



## Behind the Scenes at the Museum

### Meet Rosanna Evan

Rosanna leads the schools and teachers programme at the Fitzwilliam Museum and is undertaking a PhD with the University of Leeds and the Science Museum investigating how people remember science lessons at school. Before this, she worked at the Whipple Museum of the History of Science, cataloguing and caring for new objects and leading on the learning programme.

## The Whipple Museum of the History of Science

Free School Lane, Cambridge CB2 3RH



**Open Monday – Friday 12.30-4.30pm**

The Museum has two entrances: the **Main Entrance** on Free School Lane, suitable for visitors who are comfortable climbing a flight of stairs. **Step-free entrance** via the Pembroke Arch.

Call 01223 330906 for more details

